



Winter
1994

the MidWestern OS/2er's **GrassRoots Gazette** ©

Volume Two
Number One

originating at GREATER CHICAGO Online!! BBS (708) 895-4042 DATA
your MidWestern Connection to OS/2

MidWesterners Give OS/2 High Marks

During December, 1993 GREATER CHICAGO Online!! sponsored an OS/2 User Opinion Survey. Participants were asked how confident they were that OS/2 was winning the desktop against its competition. While some expressed a degree of concern about the outcome, most were very pleased at recent advances made by IBM with OS/2 and were confident that Big Blue's recent product announcement of OS/2 for Windows would make the difference.

Over 90 percent of the respondents felt that 32bit Application Development was the most critical factor to OS/2's success. Second was Product Performance, and third was Advertising. It is apparent that IBM has heard users on these critical issues from recent actions they've taken. The offering of free device driver developer classes in Boca, advertising blitzes in recent weekly and monthly industry publications are just a few examples.

Eleven questions asking respondents to rate IBM telephone support, OS/2 product quality, grass roots presence, trade press relations, OS/2 performance, and one question soliciting user write-in comments made up the survey. Users were asked "If OS/2 were your product, what would you do to make it more successful?"

In response to this question, there were thousands of write-in comments on hundreds of issues. The survey results as well as all write-in comments were made available to IBM on January 3. You can download these results from GREATER CHICAGO Online!! The filename is GRTRSURV.ZIP. This archive contains an Encapsulated PostScript file and a screen show of the responses to each question charted by percentage. This screen show is suitable for presentation to user groups. Also included in the archive are all the write-in comments (uncut and uncensored) in both an ASCII version as well as an Encapsulated PostScript version.

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My Best OS/2 Tip Ever *

by John Kleczewski

I've been using OS/2 for over one year now and have never heard any mention of "Command Stacking", the ability to put multiple commands on the command line. Command stacking works with the ampersand symbol (&) separating multiple commands.

ie: del *.c & del *.h & del *.mak.

Any error occurring in any command doesn't stop later commands from executing, to stop this use &&.

ie: del *.c && del *.h

Also a double pipe symbol (||) says do this only on an earlier error.

ie: del *.c || error.do.something.

And you can group commands with parenthesis.

* My Best Tip Ever won a copy of OS/2 2.1 for John Kleczewski at GREATER CHICAGO Online!!

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Someone You Should Know: James Schmidt

It's Thumbs Up! at the North Suburban Chicago OS/2 User Group(NSCOUG). And James Schmidt, co-founder and Group Leader has been one of the guiding forces that has taken the NSCOUG down the runway to success. James' group is the largest and most highly attended of the groups in the metropolitan Chicago area, and many attribute that to James' leadership.

James got together with one of his fellow Mercer employees, Eric Harrison, shortly after OS/2 2.1 GAed. They were both impressed and full of enthusiasm about this new 32bit operating system that IBM had developed. They wanted to form a Special Interest Group for Mercer that would help others learn more about OS/2. That was 18 months ago. Since then, the NSCOUG has grown to over 500 members and boasts attendance each month of over 100 for most meetings. Some attendees come from as far away as 200 miles (Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin). Agendas have included such dignitaries as John Soyring and Becky Smith of IBM, Timothy Sipples, as well as representatives from Lotus, Describe, WordPerfect, Borland, CA, Compuware, and several book authors including Steve Gutnecht and Maria Tyne. If there were a Who's Who of OS/2 User Groups, the NSCOUG would be right up there at the top.

James quickly gives a lot of the credit for the success of this group to his employer, William M. Mercer, Inc. "Mercer has come through with much of the financial support for the NSCOUG. They pay the rent for our meeting room, and have supplied refreshments on many occasions when we had a large attendance and needed a subsidy. Eric and I really could not have done this without their support."

James has been an OS/2er almost since the beginning, but he will readily tell you that he's a mainframer by trade. He makes his living as a large systems programmer, specializing in MVS and CICS. "That's what puts the meat on the table," he says. "OS/2 is just a hobby." But it's one that he pursues with great enthusiasm. "The really big reason that I'm so impressed with OS/2 is because it's MVS on the PC. I like working with operating systems and OS/2 is a REAL operating system," he says.

He's a mega-fan of IBM's OS/2 product. "It's the way they support it," says James. "With CSDs. Fantastic! Another vendor I know that's trying to develop a competitive 32bit operating system just tells you 'it will be fixed in the next release'! Not IBM! They're a software vendor who supports their product LONG AFTER it has been marketed."

James' 15 years in MIS have found him at the leading edge of a lot of good technology. The HP45, BetaMax, the Pulsar Watch, his first computer (a Commodore) have all been part of the Schmidt experience. While still an accountant, he taught himself 6502 assembler language and THEN decided to become a Systems Programmer.

And it's not all work and no play for James. His favorite story is about the time he played a practical joke on his flight instructor. James is a private pilot and learned to fly in a Cessna 152 in the mid 70s. After his check-ride (exam to pass his private pilot test), he and his examiner cooked up a phony story that he had flunked the test because he'd taken his glasses off to wipe his forehead after the test while they were still taxiing back to the flight office. James waited until the examiner had departed the scene to tell his instructor



**James Schmidt at the controls of his favorite airplane
a Piper Archer II**

photo by G. Orsinger

the news. Upon hearing James' sad tale, his instructor ran to the airport radio transmitter and shouted obscenities over the airport Unicom frequency to the examiner as he was taking off down the runway. James claims he still has black and blue marks from the pounding he received from his instructor after the truth came out.

James lives in North Suburban Chicago with his wife, Gail and their two sons, Eric and Jason. James considers himself extremely lucky to have a wife that is as understanding as Gail. Summers will find them trekking up to Northern Wisconsin for two weeks of fishing and family fun at a rented cabin. The location is a family secret. They like the solitude.

But back in Chicago, it's really a hot-bed of OS/2 activity. That's no secret. And one of the reasons it's so active is because of people like James Schmidt of William M. Mercer, Inc. There's a lot going on with OS/2 and if you're ever in the area and you have some time to spend an evening with a bunch of OS/2ers, you can reach James Schmidt and the NSCOUG at (708) 317-7405.

He's *Someone You Should Know*. And now you do.

To interested parties

If you would like to be a regular contributor to the Gazette, or if you have an article you'd like to submit, please contact us at (708) 895-4561 voice, or log on to:

GREATER CHICAGO Online!! at (708) 895-4042

and tell us about it. We welcome contributions of a technical as well as editorial nature. If it's about OS/2 and advances the cause of OS/2, then it probably belongs in the Gazette. You can also write to the Gazette at:

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An Open Letter to the Budding OS/2 Software Developer by Timothy F. Sipples

Dear OS/2 Software Developer:

I know you are either considering a foray into the OS/2 software market or you are already here. I am writing this letter to you to save you the pain and agony (mostly self inflicted) WordPerfect suffered in announcing its decision to halt development on Version 6.0 of its flagship product for OS/2. When WordPerfect made its announcement shortly before Comdex, the company sheepishly advised its loyal customers to run the Windows version of their word processor inside OS/2. Naturally, the phones starting ringing on the Lotus order line.

To spare you, the present or future OS/2 software developer, a similar fate, I would like to offer you some free advice. WordPerfect learned a simple (but hard) lesson, that OS/2 users will refuse to buy a half-baked port when superior DOS or Windows solutions are available. OS/2, after all, is superbly backward compatible. IBM has designed an operating system that pays attention to the needs of both developers and users, not just the former. No wonder OS/2 sales are taking off.

So where are the applications to satisfy this fast growing market? Of course you are going to help solve that problem. Because, while OS/2 users are no fools (as WordPerfect learned), they do prefer OS/2 applications when they offer clear advantages over their DOS and Windows counterparts. Frankly, it sounds like I am stating the obvious. After all, the same pattern was observed in the migration to Windows which occurred not too long ago. DOS users had no intention of giving up their well crafted software for questionable Windows alternatives. Remember that WordPerfect missed the boat with Windows, too.

The successful software developer anticipates user demands and plans accordingly. If, for example, you bought into the hype surrounding NT (or are still being led astray by the PR machine in Redmond), I welcome you back down to earth (and OS/2). There is an eager market of over four million consumers, ready to pounce on great OS/2 software. Or perhaps you are already learning about the OS/2 marketplace. Some of you might even be among its brightest luminaries (like SofNet or, with qualifications, Lotus).

I would like to present you with a reasonably exhaustive list of what it will take to compete in this large and growing market. Do not think for a moment that a weekend or two (and a telephone call to Micrographx) will allow you to port last year's Windows version to OS/2 for a quick million sales. OS/2 users are savvy but loyal consumers with reasonable demands: that you spend a little bit of time making the products they purchase a little special. Here's how you do it, in twelve easy steps.

Price. Since DOS and Windows applications are available to OS/2ers in abundance (and run better than ever), make sure your application does not cost any more than a Windows competitor. Like it or not, the days of \$500 spreadsheets are over. That does not mean you cannot make lots of money. It is less crowded on the OS/2 playing field. Or would you prefer to compete on a court full of Michael Jordans?

Features. If your OS/2 application is missing too many features which a Windows competitor displays proudly, you will be in trouble. Careful, Lotus: shipping 1-2-3 for OS/2 without an Excel filter was not too bright. I am glad you seem to understand that.

REXX. IBM introduced a macro/scripting/batch language called REXX into OS/2 1.3, and yet some developers still do not understand that users will not tolerate learning yet another application macro language. Make sure your application can use REXX as its own macro language (at least in addition to your own) and that REXX scripts can access functions within your application. Good job, Lotus.

Workplace Shell/SOM. The most unheralded feature about OS/2 is its Workplace Shell, built atop SOM, the first sensible object model in the industry. Your application should integrate seamlessly with the Workplace Shell. From a user perspective, that means that colors dragged from the Color Palette change the appearance of your application. Elements (such as filenames) pulled to the Shredder are deleted. And so on. Take a look at Lotus cc:Mail, the shareware program PMView, or HockWare's VisPro/REXX for cues.

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and downloading filename GZT0194.ZIP. This archive contains this issue of the Gazette which may be printed on any PostScript Printer.

OPEN LETTER (continued from Page 3)

MMPM/2. Byte Magazine called IBM's multimedia extensions for OS/2 the best in the business. If you ship your application on CD-ROM (and it should be available that way), you can include software motion video files which train users on how to take advantage of your software, for example. Your application itself can use MMPM/2 services to provide something other than the normal beeps and hisses coming from the standard speaker. If you are trying to sell communications software, why not allow the user to select an audio file for playback when a download completes? Of course, there is plenty of room for applications centered around multimedia. SDS's Galactic Civilizations game for OS/2 should turn a few heads (and wallets).

Multithreading. Your application should never display an hourglass except when the pointer is located inside your application's window and the application cannot possibly provide any kind of attention to the user. That still means I should be able to minimize your application, close it, etc. Sensible, logical use of threads can help your application be more responsive. And always use a separate thread to handle all user input. Lotus: kill that logo screen when your OS/2 applications load. The advertising isn't so bad, but at least let me open another folder while you are loading.

Installation. Don't walk all over my hard drive, depositing suspicious DLLs in the VOS2 directory. And wouldn't a de-install feature be nice? (Kudos, DeScribe.) Be sure you know what CID stands for, too. (Configuration/Installation/Distribution, to be precise. In IBM speak, that's the ability to install an application from a network server.) Take care that everything placed on the hard disk actually needs to be there (and allow the user to decide whether a particular feature, and the disk space it occupies, is worthwhile or not). If, for example, you include wonderful MMPM/2-influenced online help, make sure it can be used from CD-ROM. Users are balking at 32 Mb word processors and 28 Mb spreadsheets.

32-bits. Don't care. Need I say more?

User interface. Spend some time on it, please. Make sure you view the applets IBM kindly included with OS/2 as examples on how not to design your user interfaces. For instance, PM Terminal effectively demonstrates why Workplace Shell notebook settings objects and HPFS long filename support are needed so badly.

Online help. IBM provided a powerful help engine

for OS/2 called Information Presentation Facility. It can at times be quirky, but it works. Use it. (Lotus?)

Extended attributes and HPFS long filenames. OS/2 includes some fundamental improvements on the CP/M-style "8 dot 3" file system invented in the 1970s. Do not let your application rely on three letter file extensions — register proper file types with OS/2, and use them. Make sure long filename support is pervasive in your application.

Testing. Just when you think you have a wonderful application ready for market, test it again. Let some real "power users" grapple with your beta code, and listen to them. Plan for the longest testing phase in the history of your company, then triple that estimate. OS/2 users have a quality operating system, so you should do your best to provide them with quality applications.

Timothy Sipples is the author of the OS/2 FAQ. You can reach him at sip1@midway.uchicago.edu

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WINOS2

by Sheherezade

R. I. P.

